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SUBJECT: JAPAN'S 2009 FREEDOM DEFENDER NOMINATION

REF: A. STATE 98406
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ACCORDINGLY.

1 (SBU) Mission Japan nominates Hiroshi Kato, Executive
Director of Life Funds for North Korean Refugees for the 2009
Freedom Defenders Award.

2 (SBU) Each year, thousands of refugees flee North Korea
into China. Once in China, many of the women, who constitute
the majority of the refugees, are sold as "brides" or
otherwise sexually exploited and abused. If discovered by
Chinese authorities, the refugees may be forced back to North
Korea where they face imprisonment or possible execution.
Mr. Kato co-founded Life Funds for North Korea Refugees
(LFNKR) in 1997 to address this situation.

3 (SBU) LFNKR's activities include the following: it works
in the border regions to provide refugees with food,
clothing, and medicine; it cooperates with sympathetic
networks in China to provide shelter to the refugees; it
helps those refugees in China and Russia, whose lives are in
great danger, enter a third country safely; it provides
assistance with school fees to children born of a North
Korean mother and a Chinese father (these children do not
have Chinese citizenship under Chinese law); it advocates
internationally for these vulnerable refugees for their
treatment and status to be in accordance with the
International Convention on the Status of Refugees; it
provides support and assistance to refugees who have settled
in Japan.

4 (SBU) Since its founding, the LFNKR has succeeded in
resettling hundreds of refugees, often at great risk. Mr.
Kato himself was arrested in China on October 30, 2002,
expelled on November 6 of that year, and barred from
re-entering the country for five years. In February 2009,
the North Korean People's Security Ministry issued an arrest
warrant for him and three other human rights activists. Mr.
Kato and LFNKR have at great risk in a dangerous environment,
demonstrated leadership, and creativity at the grassroots
level in protecting the lives, and human rights of North
Korean refugees, particularly, the women and children whose
situation is the direst.

[1](#)5. (SBU) Mr. Kato was born in Fukushima Prefecture, Japan in
[1](#)1945. After graduating from Rikkyo University, he worked as
a cameraman and journalist in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, the
Philippines, and Russia. He is the author of three books:
"Reports from Uncharted States," "The Yellow Revolution in

the Philippines," and a photobook about the Karen people of
Burma, "Kawthoolei."
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